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After the Denial

Tom Athanasiou*

A point of no return can be avoided, even if the tipping level is temporarily exceeded. Ocean and ice sheet inertia permit overshoot, provided the climate forcing is returned below the tipping level before initiating irreversible dynamic change.

- James Hansen, *et.al*, 2008¹

Any serious discussion of climate change must begin with climate science. And, at this point, any honest evaluation of climate science will reveal that climate change is serious indeed. Despite the dangers of apocalyptic rhetoric, it's not too much to speak of a 'climate emergency.' Moreover, this emergency presses despite the all the other pathologies of modern society, despite the economic crisis and the energy crisis and the security crisis and despite even the fact that we live in a world in which billions of impoverished people suffer lives of incessant, grinding, daily emergency. This last crisis, in fact, this is exactly where we have to begin. There is no choice between climate protection and human development. We shall have both, or we shall have neither.

In this context, the temptation to temporize is extremely strong, and it's essential to maintain the political discipline needed to heed the lessons of an increasingly inconvenient science. To be sure, considerations of framing, strategy, sequencing, tactics, institutional design and, inevitably, political tradeoff are entirely legitimate. However our proper beginning is the science, for it illuminates the intractable conditions of the climate challenge. Here, I'll cite only two items in an *accelerating* avalanche of findings. The first is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's

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1. James Hansen et al., *Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?*, <http://arxiv.org/abs/0804.1126> (last revised June 18, 2008) [hereinafter Hansen, *Target Atmospheric CO₂*].

(IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (AR4).² The AR4 is simultaneously the most authoritative and influential summary of climate science yet published and, at the same time, a lagging and even conservative view of the scientific consensus.³ The second is *Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?*, a recent paper by James Hansen and his team that will hopefully mark the long-overdue end of the age of denial.⁴

The short version of this long story is that the post-AR4 science (ice melt and carbon cycle science in particular) is significantly more challenging than AR4 would lead us to believe. In response, the scientific community has become much more forthright about the concentration targets and emission trajectories required to meet the climate emergency. Not that many scientists use the “E word” – emergency – but some recent works⁵ certainly makes it easier for others to do so, and then to draw conclusions. One such conclusion is that our goal, now, has to be to put the total decarbonization of the global economy squarely onto the political agenda as quickly as humanly possible. Which, as this paper will argue, means that the climate protection agenda has to be expanded to include the protection of the poor and the innocent around the world, and the preservation of their “right to development.”

Moreover, this is something of a public secret – widely known but rarely remarked. Certainly it was widely suspected in Bali in December of 2007, at the U.N. Climate Change Conference, though it was rarely spoken from the official platforms, at least not with the blunt simplicity appropriate to such a world-changing truth. Still, the silence is breaking. The official Bali debate was, after all, framed by AR4’s carefully formulated finding that, to have a real chance of holding the total warming below 2°C – the customary and most widely cited threshold of truly “dangerous” climate change – we have to reduce Annex 1 emissions⁶ to 25 percent to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, while at the same time doing our part to ensure

2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT: WORKING GROUP III REPORT MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE (2007)[hereinafter IPCC AR4].

3. The IPCC is forced by its intergovernmental charter into a measured conservatism that sometimes leads to excessively conservative treatments of emerging science. See M. Oppenheimer, et al., *The Limits of Consensus*, 317 SCIENCE 1505-06 (2007).

4. Hansen, *Target Atmospheric CO₂*, *supra* note 1.

5. See David Spratt & Philip Sutton, CLIMATE CODE RED: THE CASE FOR EMERGENCY ACTION (Scribe Publications 2008), available at <http://www.climatecodered.net> for an overview of explosion in literature on this subject.

6. The “Annex 1” countries are those that have quantified emissions limitation targets under the terms of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

“substantial deviation from baseline” emissions in much of the developing world.⁷ Whatever this means, and whether it turns out to be enough, one thing is clear: This is hardly business as usual.

Below is the top of Box 13.7 in AR4’s Working Group III volume,⁸ the source of the 25 percent to 50 percent numbers that defined the Bali debate:

Scenario category	Region	2020	2050
	Annex 1	-25% to -40%	-80% to -95%
	Non-Annex 1	Substantial deviation from baseline in Latin America, Middle East, East Asia, and Centrally Planned Asia	Substantial deviation from baseline in all regions

Here is the bad news: this table describes the most stringent scenarios (category A) that have been officially reviewed by the IPCC, and while they’re unrealistically severe (they aim for a greenhouse gas concentration target of 450 ppm CO₂-equivalent) from the perspective of politics-as-usual (in the U.S., even the best of the climate legislation now active in Congress⁹ calls for a mere return to 1990 emissions by 2020) they’re still too lax to hold total global warming to 2°C.¹⁰ In fact, if we want a decent chance of holding the 2°C line, we need to stabilize the greenhouse gas concentration of the atmosphere not at the 450 ppm CO₂-equivalent, but at 400 ppm CO₂-equivalent, a considerably lower level.¹¹ Or, as Hansen’s team puts it, after taking non-CO₂ forcings into proper account, this means 350 ppm CO₂ “at most.”¹² To put this another way: The IPCC / Bali range of 25 percent to 40

7. IPCC AR4, *supra* note 2, at 776, available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg3/ar4-wg3-chapter13.pdf>. These figures entered the policy debate by way of Box 13.7. For critical details, see Table TS.2, available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg3/ar4-wg3-ts.pdf>, which shows that *all* category I scenarios (the low-emissions group) have global emissions peaking by 2015.

8. IPCC AR4, *supra* note 2, at 776

9. Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act, available at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-309>, New Apollo Energy Act of 2007, available at <http://govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-2809>, and Safe Climate Act of 2007, available at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1590>, all intend to return U.S. emissions back to their 1990 levels by 2020. This is quite ambitious, when compared to the rest of the bills in U.S. legislative competition, but far short of the 25 percent to 40 percent stipulated by the IPCC “category I” scenarios.

10. Paul Baer et al., THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT IN A CLIMATE CONSTRAINED WORLD 19-22 (Heinrich Boll Foundation 2007), available at <http://www.ecoequity.org/docs/TheGDRsFramework.pdf> [hereinafter Baer, *The Right to Development*].

11. *Id.*

12. Hansen, *Target Atmospheric CO₂*, *supra* note 1, at 1.

percent Annex-1 reductions by 2020 is imprecise, and too forgiving. If we want a decent chance of holding global warming within manageable limits, then today's atmospheric CO₂ concentration (385 ppm CO₂) is already too high. This means that, here in Annex 1, we have to shoot for the high end of AR4's 25 percent by 40 percent by 2020 reduction range. When it comes to non-Annex-1, the proper goal is one that underlines and italicizes the IPCC's subtle note about "substantial" reductions from baseline." Even so, we'll need a bit of luck as well.

I. The Structure of the Climate Problem

We are used to presenting the Bali conference as a qualified success, and indeed it is. However, it's also the case that the Bali consensus was terribly preliminary. It doesn't include any useful guidance on a global target. It doesn't refer to 'commitments' for industrialized countries, except when coupled with the undermining phrase "or actions."¹³ On the critical matter of developing country agreements, or commitments, or actions – even the nouns here are explosively controversial – it managed only to reveal the edge of a gigantic minefield, and to point, vaguely, in the direction by which it must be crossed.

The revelation came by way of a linkage, in which the search for "*nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing country Parties in the context of sustainable development*," was formally acknowledged, but only insofar as it was "*supported and enabled by technology, financing and capacity-building, in a measurable, reportable and verifiable manner*."¹⁴ This was the key point of contention throughout the Bali talks, and this was the short, dry text which led to the U.S.'s dramatic isolation, and, on that tense final Saturday, to the overtime confrontation that saw the Bush administration finally back down from its attempts to block a near unanimous recognition of historical necessity.

That necessity should be stated clearly: as everyone in Bali knew, the "technology, financing and capacity-building." At the center of the debate would ultimately have to come by way of an international mobilization in which the wealthy, somehow, some way, came to accept the simple reality that they alone have the money to decisively act.¹⁵

This issue is not even close to being resolved, but it has been illuminated. This allows us to clearly state the essentials of the problem, and to do so with new salience. The reason finance and technology transfer are so critical is that dramatic reductions in developing world emissions are

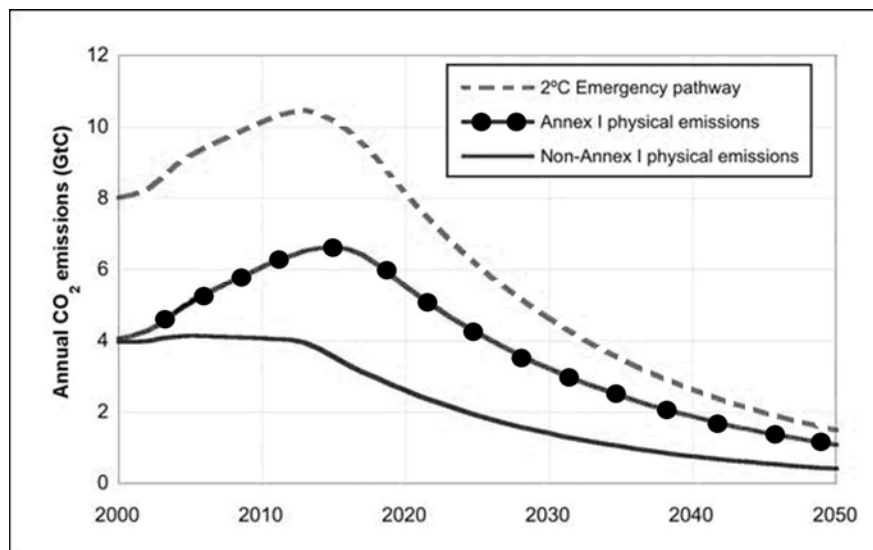
13. An "action" is undermining because it has no legal definition. A commitment is quantified and binding.

14. Climate Change Conference, December 3-14, 2007, *Bali Action Plan*, U.N. Doc. FCCC/CP/2007/L.7/Rev.1 (December 14, 2007).

15. *Id.*

now an absolute necessity. Yet, at the same time, the developing world negotiators consider economic growth and poverty alleviation to be their utmost priorities, and are extremely suspicious of any climate agreement that would require reductions without ensuring that those reductions will not impede the development of the nations that they represent. This tension – between the demands of the climate and the development of the South – is at the very center of the global climate impasse.

The situation can be clearly illustrated, as for example in the following graph, which is taken from the second editions of a recent report, *The Right to Development in a Climate Constrained World: The Greenhouse Development Rights Framework*.¹⁶



The story here is the story of the future; it's as simple as it is significant. Think of it as a story that involves a little bit of science, a little bit of conjecture, and a little bit of arithmetic.

The uppermost line is the science (2°C Emergency pathway). It represents the global emissions trajectory we need if we're to avoid a true climate catastrophe. Here this trajectory is drawn, optimistically, to give us a reasonable likelihood of keeping the warming below 2°C. It shows an emergency pathway – and there's no denying its ambition – that has global emissions peaking by 2020 and then declining 80 percent by mid-century. Yet note that even this pathway, one that would require an unprecedented global mobilization, implies considerable climate risks, for it would leave us

16. Baer, *THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT*, *supra* note 10, at 59.

with a roughly 20 percent to 35 percent probability of exceeding 2°C of warming. It cannot, by any means, be said to be “safe.”

The lowermost line is the conjecture (Annex 1 physical emissions).

It supposes that the wealthy countries will accept their obligation to make very ambitious domestic cuts. Thus, the blue line supposes that all Annex 1 countries – the U.S. and Canada, Europe, Russia – manage to reduce their emissions as quickly and as deeply as Al Gore, for example, has called for.¹⁷ It shows a 90 percent reduction in emissions (below 1990) by 2050 in all those countries, and thus it illustrates the still-significant portion of the extremely small remaining global carbon budget that the North would consume even if it were to honestly follow a frankly ambitious course of emissions reductions.

Now, if the North managed such a feat, what would it imply in the South? Here’s where we come to the arithmetic.

The middle line shows how much of the limited remaining global carbon budget would be left for the use of the South (Non-Annex physical emissions). It is not much. In fact, to hold this line, the South would need to develop along a path that peaks and declines by 2020, and do so while its people are, on average, still quite poor. Which is precisely the source of the tension between climate protection and development, precisely the challenge of climate stabilization in this our very bitterly divided world.

II. Squaring the Circle

It always seems impossible until it’s done.

- Nelson Mandela

An impasse, by definition, offers no obvious way forward. However, this time there are many ways; if they’re not obvious, perhaps we’re looking in the wrong places. While most of the climate literature turns around technology and economics, we in fact have the tools needed to build, or at least begin to build, a post-greenhouse world. Moreover, we can afford to do so in the scarce time remaining.

Why then the impasse? Part of the answer, is North/South politics. In and of itself however, it is not a sufficient answer. For one thing, North and South are divided between rich and poor. This division is as critical, and for most people more immediate, than that between the developed and the developing world. For another, our politics is clearly too narrowly

17. Dan Shapely, *Gore Calls For 90% CO2 Reduction*, THE DAILY GREEN: THE CONSUMER’S GUIDE TO THE GREEN REVOLUTION, June 29, 2007, <http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/3083>.

conceived, particularly given the scope and urgency of the climate and development challenges. Which is not to say that a new politics – one of emergency, and possibility, and hope – will come easily or that we have a luxury of time within which to build it. If the climate agenda must be broadened to include the development crisis, and even the rich poor divide, doesn't this just make it even more overwhelming? What is the way forward? What are the ways that make strategic and not merely tactical sense?

The answers are many. To sort out the key issues, we'll have to approach them concretely, in terms of specific debates about specific technologies and specific institutions. However, in a period of emergency – a period, as Churchill said, of consequences¹⁸ – it will not do to imagine that debates about nuclear power, or carbon sequestration, or emissions trading, are discreet debates about small, particular things. Nor will it do to imagine that we can avoid the overarching questions of developmental justice in a climate constrained world. Indeed, they surround us on every side.

Consider Jim Hansen's claim that:

Continued growth of greenhouse gas emissions, for just another decade, practically eliminates the possibility of near-term return of atmospheric composition beneath the tipping level for catastrophic effects. The most difficult task, phase-out over the next 20-25 years of coal use that does not capture CO₂, is Herculean, yet feasible when compared with the efforts that went into World War II . . .¹⁹

This is not a *realistic* claim as we usually understand the term. For it is not merely a call for "no new coal," or a call for "no new coal that doesn't capture CO₂." It is a call to shut down all coal, everywhere, existing or new, that does not capture CO₂. But what would this entail? What would it cost? Who would pay that cost? Who would pay the cost in the developing world? By what means and via what institutions? And if we were to set out on this path, how would we avoid empowering the nuclear lobby? Or facilitating the damming of every remaining rift and gorge, throughout the world? How, in the midst of all the imperatives of retail economics and domestic realpolitics, in which energy mobilization and the climate transition

18. Winston Churchill, *The Locust Years*, speech given to House of Commons (Nov. 12, 1936) (transcript available at <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/Locusts.html>). Churchill was speaking of procrastination and delay in the face of grave threat. The full quote is, "The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences."

19. Hansen, *Target Atmospheric CO₂*, *supra* note 12, at 13. See also <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/19/back-to-1988-on-co2-says-nasas-hansen/>.

compete on every side with other critical issues for scarce attention and resources, can we find the drive and will to make all this so, in time and on the necessary scale?

One thing that is clear is that we've been remiss, sloppy, even self-indulgent. That we have somehow failed to prepare the ground for battles that, now, we have no choice but to engage. It's time to seek ways forward that take proper account of what is, or rather what must become, the fundamental fact of political life – the politics of emergency are not the politics of business-as-usual, but rather, and fundamentally, the politics of solidarity. These will not come easily to the climate movement as we know it, which has not generally allowed itself to cast large enough nets, or to imagine real solutions. Solutions that can work globally and, just as importantly, solutions that can work now. Right now.

The good news is that the winds of a new realism are blowing strong. An increasingly self-conscious effort to unearth and refine the critical elements of an adequate strategy is now visible, all around us. But just as new answers are emerging at the grassroots²⁰ so too a new *international* climate justice campaign has also emerged. This international campaign is, by agenda and by science, tightly bound to the international climate negotiations themselves. It is to be sure far less well known than the rank-and-file battles for community-level rebirth and solidarity that form the foundation of the traditional environmental justice movement. However, it seeks a kind of justice that would be conceived and institutionalized within the climate treaty itself, and thus may well be just as critical to our eventual success.

Simply put, the issue is developmental equity. More precisely, it is protecting the right to developmental equity in this a world where extremely rapid global emissions reductions are visibly preconditions of future well-being and stability. A world, moreover, where Southern decision makers have entirely reasonable justifications for fearing that, all else being equal, rapid global emissions reductions will fatally undermine their access to development itself, or at least, development as we know it today.

The formal problem is “principle based differentiation,” a phrase that, translated from policy lingo into simple English, means nothing more than finding *transparently fair ways* of dividing the burdens and efforts of the global greenhouse transition. Here, in the interests of full disclosure, I must say that I am very much a partisan of particular approach – the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) approach – which is described below. Though just now the details of the GDR framework matter less than the larger problem it aims to solve: how, in a political world that is defined by tactical

20. For example, the US drive for “green collar jobs” has already dreamt larger dreams, and won greater momentum, than any earlier American blue/green campaign.

and positional games, power politics, prisoners dilemmas and ad hoc trade-offs, can we move into a new global climate protection framework that's *fair enough to actually work*.

One problem deserves special attention, the problem of the North's obligations to the South. For these are both large and absolutely critical. Simply put, *if the rich countries do not provide the technology and finance needed to drive an emergency program of clean energy development in the South, then there is virtually no hope of avoiding a global climate catastrophe*. Yet, the climate movement in the North has done almost nothing to prepare the ground for this, the most daunting of all climate related challenges.

The U.S. climate movement, in particular, has focused almost exclusively on building domestic momentum by any means necessary, and to that end has actively and consciously avoided the tough international questions. The problem of the U.S. necessarily pivotal role in financing an emergency climate transition is specifically seen as a problem to be deferred. Even worse, the logic of such demurral is as strong as the logic of its refutation. After all, who will bear the risks of too much frank and honest speech? Who will argue, particularly given the fateful choices now facing the U.S., that there's no danger in a climate politics that the Right will predictably attack as a call to "write checks to China?" Only those who study the science and who allow themselves to see the implication – that without an global obligation-based accord any U.S. victory will be a pyrrhic one that's fated to be almost immediately overtaken by international events. Only those who see that the climate endgame has already arrived, and that we've no choice but to play it with the pieces at hand.

III. Greenhouse Development Rights

This endgame has become quite dramatic. Despite the fact that we have the means to prevent a true catastrophe, it is hard to see how the climate impasse will be resolved in time and in a manner that will avoid such a catastrophe. It's in this context that the GDR experiment was launched, with the goal of understanding the deep structure of the impasse in a "policy relevant" way, one that's clear enough to help us break it. Here, briefly, are some of the key features of the GDR approach.²¹

GDR builds upon the official principles of the U.N.'s Framework Convention on Climate Change, which states that signatory states should "protect the climate system . . . on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."²² In other words, on the basis of their *responsibility* and their

21. Baer, THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT, *supra* note 10.

22. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *available at* <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>, Article 3, paragraph 1.

capacity. The GDR framework combines the two into a single *obligation* indicator to determine both national obligations to mitigate and national obligations to support adaption. The latter, though it's often treated as secondary, is anything but. A great deal of suffering and destruction is inherent in the destabilized climate system and it cannot be ignored. This is not merely an ethical or moral claim; there are excellent reasons to doubt the viability of any climate protection framework that seeks to ignore or even minimize the global adaptation need.

Obligations can't be the whole story; rights also matter. However, rather than asserting, for example, an equal per-capita right to emit, the GDR framework seeks to preserve a right to dignified level of sustainable human development, even in the presence of a global climate crisis that radically restricts the use of fossil energy. Obligations are only a means to an end, a means to ensure that each nation does its fair share of whatever needs to be done. If the total burden of global climate protection turns out to be small (unlikely at this point) then even the U.S. – a wealthy country with a large historical responsibility – will have a small obligation. But if this burden turns out to be large, then, critically, the fairness of the system, and the transparency and comprehensibility of the rules by which it is determined, will be absolutely critical. Obscure deals and ad hoc arrangements, like those that underlie Kyoto's original annex structure, will not do.

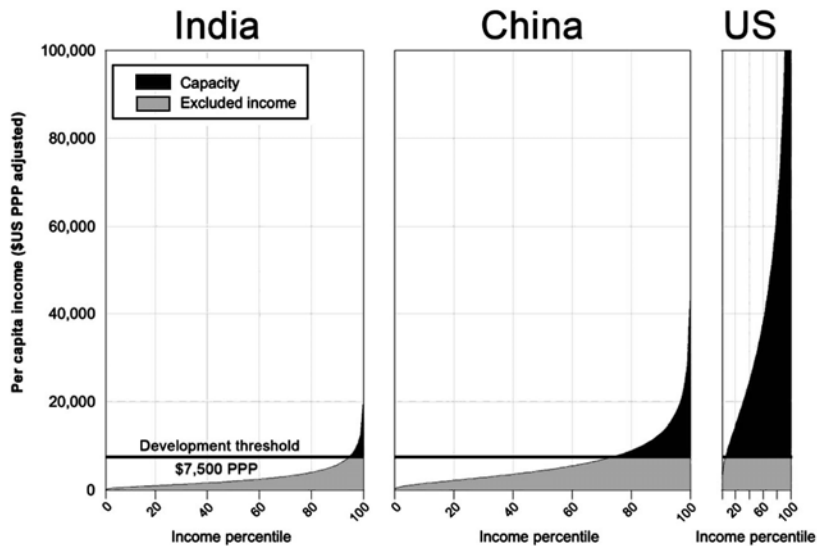
The GDR approach solves a number of problems. Most importantly, it means that a nation's obligations are not limited to the mitigation of its emissions. And why should they be? Why, given the massive fraction of the global carbon budget that's been consumed by the wealthy countries, and the horrifying impacts that these historical emissions will have on others, should their obligations be limited to the mitigation of their own future emissions? And why should we believe that, if they are so limited, a solution to the climate problem will even be possible?

If there's a single greatest problem in climate politics, it's economic and developmental inequality. How, after all, can obligations be fairly apportioned in a world divided between wealthy and developing *nations*? The answer is that it cannot be, and that obligations must be apportioned between wealthy and developing *individuals*. The GDR framework of course recognizes that this is a world of nations, and that, ultimately, it is nations and not individuals that must accept and discharge the obligations of any climate treaty. But it nevertheless defines a nation's obligations as the sum of the obligations of the individuals living that nation.

This solves the classic "Germany within India" problem.²³ Under the GDR framework, India, like any developing country, has the obligations

23. Paul Baer, et al., *The Right to Development in a Carbon Constrained World: Second Edition Executive Summary*, October 2008, available at http://www.ecoequity.org/GDRs/GDRs_

appropriate to its wealthy, or relatively wealthy (we speak in terms of a “consuming class”) sub-population. This is illustrated in the following graphic:



The curves here represent reasonable approximations of the income distributions within these three key countries. Each chart depicts a national population in terms of its income distribution, from the poorest to the richest. The first thing to notice is the horizontal line at \$9,000 per person per year (in purchasing power parity terms) that represents the GDR “development threshold.” This is a global threshold, and it is emphatically *not* an extreme poverty line. Rather, it represents a defensible definition of the threshold of real development.²⁴

The second thing to notice is that the fraction of the national population with incomes above the development threshold is shown in black. These black areas represent our definition of national capacity. So if we think of the GDR burden sharing system as a global income tax, the development threshold can be thought of as marking a “0 percent tax

ExecSummary.html. The problem here is that though, in per capita terms, there are far fewer wealthy individuals in India than in Germany, India also has a far larger total population. So, it has long been presumed, there may be just as many rich individuals *in absolute terms*. This, as it turns out, is not the case, but the problem – how to account for the rich sub-population of a poor country within a simple North/South model, is a real one.

24. Baer, *supra* note 10, at 36.

bracket," set so as to shield the resources of those who've not yet reached the development threshold.

You can see that a very small portion of India's population, less than 1 percent, earns more than the \$9,000 development threshold. A much larger portion (nearly 90 percent) of the U.S. population has earnings about this threshold. China falls between India and the US. Its consuming class is about 10 percent of its population – about one-third of the size of the US population, and it has a much smaller aggregate capacity – roughly one-fifteenth of the US aggregate capacity.

The US, despite its much smaller population, has the lion's share of the capacity. In addition, it has a similarly disproportionate national responsibility, and, combining the two, quite a large fraction of the global obligation to act. Indeed, the Greenhouse Development Rights system tells us that the US has about 33 percent of the global obligation, while China has about 5 percent.²⁵ These are striking numbers, and they have extremely significant political implications.

Right off the top, they mean that the parity implied by the now innumerable press reports that Chinese emissions have or will soon exceed US emissions is utter nonsense, for it takes no account of developmental equity, historical emissions, or capacity to pay. Even more significantly, they mean that the impasse between North and South, an impasse that threatens to condemn us to mitigation pathways too narrow and too slow to avert catastrophe, could actually be resolved. This is true because a global accord in which each nation pays its fair share is actually possible. Not that it would be easy to negotiate, or that it could be done without bravery on all sides – in the North, in the South, and among the NGOs as well. But legitimately defined, such an accord would not endanger the development of the poor.

The politics of all this is fairly stunning. Suffice it to make two final, closely related points. First, the obligations calculated by GDR, or by any other such system, must inevitably be translated into measurable, reportable, and verifiable financial transfers. In part these are for adaptation assistance, but in the first instance they must be for mitigation, because our goal has to be nothing less than the complete decarbonization of the economy – the *global* economy – within this century. There's a lot to be said about these international financial transfers, but two points in particular are critical: (1) they will be large; and (2) managing them properly is going to be one of the greatest institutional challenges of all time. What kind of institutions will we need to face that challenge? The only brief answer is "all

25. This is a 2010 projection. China's obligations increase rapidly in projections that, like those of the International Energy Agency, assume that its rapid growth will continue. See Baer, *supra* note 23, chart titled *GDR Results for Representative Countries and Groups*.

sorts of institutions,” and all of them will have to be well-designed and well-regulated. This means that fund-based institutions will have to be effectively and democratically managed, which, as history has shown, is easier said than done. It also means that market-based institutions will have to generate real physical emissions reductions under a global cap.

Second, it’s no accident that GDR entails a progressive global tax. It is quite impossible to avoid the conclusion that if we indeed wish to escape the climate trap the wealthy must pay, but to make this possible, it’s equally clear that this cannot simply mean rich world subsidies for developing world transitions. Even within the implacable logic of the North/South climate impasse, class matters and is indeed inescapable. Which is to say that, for example, it is impossible to imagine that the US will ever reach a working consensus to pay its large fraction of the total global mitigation and adaption “bill” if the “wealthy” people in the Indian and Chinese nations are not also paying their “fair shares.”

In the end, only a few things matter. One is that we are entirely justified in speaking of a global climate emergency. The other is that, even when resorting to such “hot” language, we do nothing to cede our right to the language of hope. Which is why, among all the analogies now being invoked to speak of the necessary mobilization – e.g., an Apollo Project, a Marshall Plan – the best may well be the US WWII mobilization, especially the “New Deal” that made it possible. It’s particularly apt because that mobilization had a great deal to do with justice, with opportunity, with the solidarity of real as well as imaginary community. And if anything is clear about the climate mobilization, it’s that solidarity will figure large this time around as well.

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